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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, March 13, 2007

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The Daily Telegram

[Print Page](#)**TUESDAY MARCH 13, 2007** Last modified: *Tuesday, March 13, 2007 10:04 AM EDT*

Adrian daycare operator charged with child abuse

Douglas Clark, owner of Guardian Family Daycare, is accused of having oral sex with an unidentified infant.

By [Dennis Pelham](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Authorities were releasing little information Monday on an ongoing investigation into the alleged sexual abuse of children by Guardian Family Daycare owner, 52-year-old Douglas Jay Clark of Erie Street in Adrian.

Clark was arraigned from the Lenawee County Jail by video Monday afternoon on a single charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. According to court documents, he is accused of having oral sex with an unidentified infant.

A \$5 million bond set after Clark's arrest over the weekend was continued pending a preliminary examination in Lenawee County District Court. The hearing was initially scheduled for March 26 before Judge Natalia M. Koselka. The first-degree criminal sexual conduct charge carries a maximum life prison term.

"Right now were sorting through several potential victims," said Adrian Police Chief Terry Collins. Additional warrants are expected to be authorized as the investigation continues, he said. It was not known yet if victims in the case were the children of child care clients or connected to Clark in some other way, he said.

Two Adrian police investigators have been working on the case since Friday afternoon, he said. An investigation was started after a parent of one of the children at the center called police and reported suspicions of criminal sexual conduct involving minor children, Collins said.

After an initial investigation of the complaint late Friday afternoon, he said officers obtained a search warrant for the residence. Clark was arrested as a result of the search. Several items of evidence were confiscated at the residence and secured for further investigation, Collins said in a statement issued Monday.

Lovinna Clark, contacted by telephone at Guardian Family Daycare, said she did not want to talk about the police investigation.

"It's devastating. My whole life is ruined, so are the children's," she said.

Guardian Family Daycare, at 1013 Erie St., is licensed by the Michigan Department of Human Services and was last granted a license renewal in June 2005. Spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said the state agency began an investigation of its own over the weekend. She said she cannot comment on pending investigations.

Lenawee County Prosecutor Irving Shaw said his office was in contact with Adrian police over the weekend and received information for the single charge that was authorized on Monday. Shaw declined to comment on what he



ABUSE CHARGES: Police are investigating the alleged sexual abuse of children by Douglas Jay Clark, who runs his daycare, Guardian Family Daycare out of this home on Erie Street in Adrian. — Telegram photo by Mike Calamungi

has learned of the investigation so far until written reports from Adrian police are turned in for review.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Dad accused in son's death pleads for leniency

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

NEWAYGO -- John Murphy III has spent eight months in jail, awaiting his fate for the events leading to the death of his infant son last summer while fleeing police.

During that stay, he has become drug-free, has been remorseful for his actions and is ready to find a future -- possibly in the U.S. Navy, Murphy wrote in letters to a judge.

Murphy appeared in Newaygo County Circuit Court on Monday, but his sentencing was adjourned after his substitute defense attorney cited a conflict of interest.

The defense attorney said she has represented the mother of three of Murphy's other children and they have talked about Murphy case, so she excused herself from his case. Murphy's regular defense lawyer is expected back in court next week.

Anticipating his sentencing, Murphy wrote to Circuit Judge Terrence Thomas, asking for leniency.

While manslaughter charges against the 26-year-old Newaygo man were dropped in December after a medical examiner determined Murphy's baby's death by asphyxiation could have been accidental, Murphy pleaded no contest and will be sentenced for fleeing and eluding and resisting or obstructing police. He could receive up to 15 years in prison.

In one of two recent letters to the judge, Murphy said he spent his time in jail evaluating his life. While he never mentions his dead son, Jayden, by name, he wrote that he takes "full responsibility" for the situation.

"My heart is filled with anguish at no one but myself for allowing my ignorant decision-making to effect so many lives opposed to my own. This has been a severe learning experience already considering all I've lost," Murphy wrote.

The incident began when a state police trooper pulled over Murphy's vehicle last August. Murphy, with his 10-month-old son in his car, fled the traffic stop. He did not have a valid driver's license and there was a bench warrant for his arrest. Police said they dropped back from the pursuit, concerned about the baby's safety.

After Murphy's car hit a trailer, he took off running through the woods with his son in his arms. Police said he covered the baby's mouth to keep him from crying and being discovered.

Murphy said he tried to resuscitate the baby. He ran to the mobile home he shared with the baby's mother, 22-year-old Brandi Coronado, and hid beneath a sink. She found her baby on the floor not breathing and summoned police, who were in the yard.

In his letter to the judge, Murphy included a form letter he received from the Navy, stating "the information you provided us indicates you're eligible for the Navy."

According to a recruiter at the Navy office in Muskegon, felons have a "50/50 chance" of getting into the service, and are judged on an individual basis. It's unknown if Naval officials were informed of Murphy's criminal record.

He spent nearly four years in prison for a 2000 arson conviction. He was released in March 2005, then in October 2005 was convicted of breaking into a car and stealing. In December 2005, he spent four months in jail and was given 18 months probation.

In an earlier letter to the judge, Murphy wrote: "I never had a stable support system, that probably leads to my knack for making poor decisions. But my family has come together to help me better myself."

He asked for another chance "to prove to myself I'm better than crud," he wrote.

Send e-mail to the author: tmcclellan@grpress.com

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March 13, 2007

Teacher faces sex charges

International Academy instructor arrested after chatting online with cop he thought was boy, 14.

Shawn D. Lewis / The Detroit News

CLINTON TOWNSHIP -- A longtime teacher at the nationally renowned International Academy in Bloomfield Hills was charged Monday with trying to arrange sex with an underage boy on the Internet.

Richard Joseph Krisniski, 47, was charged Monday in 41-B District Court with five felonies, including child sexually abusive activity and using a computer to communicate with another to commit a crime.

Krisniski has been an English teacher at International Academy since 1987. At least one parent said he was well-liked and trusted by students.

"I think this could have happened at any school at anytime," said Jean Schramm, whose daughter, a senior, had Krisniski as a teacher. "She liked him, trusted him, and is very upset and saddened that he violated the trust the kids placed in him. He was a very good teacher, well-liked and she said the kids went to him with their problems."

Krisniski has been suspended indefinitely from teaching.

Principal Bert Okma deferred questions to the Bloomfield Hills School District, which oversees the academy. The district will provide crisis counselors in school today, Superintendent Steve Gaynor said.

"We're cooperating with the police and want to ensure that the emotional well-being of all students is protected," Gaynor said in a statement.

According to the Macomb County Sheriff's Office, a deputy with the Macomb Area Computer Enforcement team was on the Internet on Friday portraying himself as a 14-year-old boy. While he was online, deputies say Krisniski initiated an online chat with the "boy" and made arrangements with him for the purpose of having oral sex.

When Krisniski arrived at the arranged location, he was arrested.

According to the Michigan State Police, Krisniski has no criminal record. He remains in Macomb County Jail on a \$100,000 bond that was issued Saturday.

The International Academy has repeatedly been named among the top schools in the nation by Newsweek magazine, including a No. 1 ranking in 2003 and No. 2 in 2005.

Detroit News Staff Writer Charles E. Ramirez contributed to this report. You can reach Shawn D. Lewis at (258) 647-8825 of slewis@detnews.com.

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Teacher charged as online predator

He allegedly tried to arrange sex with boy using chat room.

By Norb Franz

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A 47-year-old teacher from Troy was arraigned Monday on charges he used the Internet to try to arrange a sexual encounter with a minor.

Richard Joseph Krisniski, an instructor at the International Academy in Bloomfield Hills, was arrested Friday by officers targeting online sexual predators.

An undercover officer with the Macomb Area Computer Enforcement Team portrayed himself as a 14-year-old boy. While he was in an Internet chat room, the suspect initiated an online conversation and said he wanted to meet with the "boy" for oral sex, according to the Macomb County Sheriff Department.

The chats between Krisniski and the undercover officer began in mid-February, Sheriff's Capt. Anthony Wickersham said.

On Friday, the suspect arranged to meet the "boy" at an agreed location.

When Krisniski arrived, MACE officers and deputies arrested him.

Krisniski was arraigned Monday in 41B District Court in Clinton Township on one count of child sexually abusive activity, and four counts of using a computer to commit a crime. He was jailed in lieu of \$100,000.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for March 26.

Wickersham declined to disclose the location of the arrest.

According to its Web site, International Academy is tuition-free high school of choice for students of 11 Oakland County school districts "collaborating in consortium with university and business partners.

Principal Bert Okma was in a meeting Monday afternoon and unavailable for comment, said a woman who answered the phone.

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Fund-raiser for Grant children scheduled at Greystone Golf Club

More donations come in for Tara's young son, daughter.

By Mitch Hotts

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

As donations continue to arrive for a trust fund for the children of slain businesswoman Tara Grant, a local entertainment company has a fund-raiser in the works for next month.

Steve Baker of Chesterfield Township-based Salute to the Superstars said a pasta dinner with entertainment by Las Vegas-style celebrity impersonators will be held April 20 at Greystone Golf Club in Washington Township.

"The entertainers have agreed to donate their services so that we could come together and do something to try to help out these children," Baker said.

With a goal of raising \$20,000, the \$28-per-person tickets will include a spaghetti dinner with rolls and salad, along with a musical show. There also will be 50-50 raffles and a chance to bid on songs performed by the impersonators.

Greystone has agreed to provide the room and food at a discount and Baker has lined up volunteers to work the event.

The proceeds will go to the Grant Children's Trust Fund, which will be used to help the family who gains custody of Grant's 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son.

The custody issue is the subject of a court case now under way in Macomb County between Tara Grant's sister and relatives of her husband, Stephen Grant, who has been charged in her death.

Baker will announce further details of the program at a news conference today at Greystone Golf Club on Mound Road.

Meanwhile, continued media coverage of the Grant case has resulted in more donations coming to the Warren Bank in Clinton Township, which is administering the fund.

Vince Viviano, a loan officer for Warren Bank, said he is not allowed by law to say how much money is in the fund. He said the donations have been coming through the mail, e-mail and the telephone.

"The process really seems to be gaining steam now," Viviano said. "I think it's an indication that it will grow in the coming weeks."

Stephen Grant is being held in Macomb County Jail after he was formally charged in the Feb. 9 strangulation death of his wife. Prosecutors allege he killed Tara Grant during an argument in their home, dismembered the body and left body parts in Stony Creek Metropark.

Tara Grant was employed by an engineering firm that often sent her to Puerto Rico on weekdays and she would return home on weekends.

Stephen Grant reported his wife missing Feb. 14 and police later found her mutilated torso in

the family garage during a March 2 search of the residence.

Stephen Grant, 37, was arrested in northern Michigan after he fled his home when police arrived with a search warrant.

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College men strut their 'stuff' to earn top prize as 'Mr. Hillsdale'

[Tanya Wilt](#), Staff Writer
517.437.6014

After enduring four rounds of competition in front of a small panel of judges, including professors at Hillsdale College, Brandon Muri emerged the winner, taking the title of the first-ever "Mr. Hillsdale 2007."

Advertisement

"It's a great privilege," said Muri of his new title. He laughed as he said he feels undeserving, though the majority of the votes in his favor said otherwise. Participation in the event was open only to male Hillsdale College students.

For his efforts Muri won Ben Folds Five concert tickets. Runner up Mark Nicolet received a \$50 gift certificate to Jonesville's Chicago Water Grill.

Held on stage in Phillips Auditorium, participants were elected either by the fraternities with which they are associated or by an independent popular vote. Only two of the 10 men had no fraternity backing.

The idea for the Mr. Hillsdale 2007 pageant was "just an idea we came up with," said Grace Schuler, president at Pi Beta Phi. The event was held for the purpose of raising money for Child Abuse and Prevention Awareness (CAPA) in Hillsdale County and was meant to be fun, said Schuler. No responsibilities will be expected of the winner, she said.

The goal was to raise \$500, said Schuler, but the actual amount, not yet determined, is expected to exceed the goal.

The show consisted of four separate rounds, including; formal, talent, beach and question rounds.

The men dressed in formal attire in the first round, escorted an equally well-dressed female hostess onto the stage. The men were judged on their aesthetic appeal as well as their interactions with the ladies. The talent round had much of the crowd on their feet in support of their favorite candidate. The men did what they felt they did best — including, singing, rapping, playing various instruments and one even performed a one-man skit. The round was judged in part by audience response. The third round brought out the men in beachwear, again escorted by a female companion. The fourth and final round assessed the candidate's smarts and quickness. Each participant had to draw a question out of a paper bag, and was judged on the quality and their confidence in their answer.

While a few took the competition straight-faced, others had fun with it, at their own expense. The talent round choices in particular had many of the men getting laughs from audience members.

Title winner Muri, played guitar as he sang a nursery rhyme-styled song about finding the girl of his dreams. Audience members laughed at the silly, rhyming lyrics. Barely skipping a beat after dropping the microphone, Muri continued on as a friend from the audience hopped on-stage to hold the fallen equipment.

A member of the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Music Fraternity, Muri said he was happy to do the show but took the competition in stride. "I just didn't want to be serious. I just wanted to

have fun,” he said.

Peter Manto, a Delta Sigma Phi member, said he got involved in the competition when one of his friends anonymously elected him. Manto said he was not too disappointed about not winning the title and said he had a good time with it. “It was fun,” said Manto. “It’s more fun if you take it on a whim.”

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Added penalty possible for domestic homicide

March 13, 2007

BY KORIE WILKINS

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A state lawmaker wants to give domestic violence homicides, like other felonies that result in death, the strictest penalty upon conviction: life in prison without parole.

"Our current laws fall short in addressing intimate partner murder," state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, said Monday. He plans to introduce legislation today.

Under Law's proposal, domestic violence homicides would fall in the same category as deaths occurring during felonies such as armed robbery, rape and arson.

Currently, if a store clerk is killed during an armed robbery, for example, prosecutors don't have to show premeditation or deliberation to get a first-degree murder conviction, Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca said.

Law would like to extend this provision to cases in which a person is killed during a domestic dispute.

Under state law, individuals convicted of first-degree murder get a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

"It's an important change," Gorcyca said Monday. "Obviously, this bill won't save lives. But it will make those who effectuate these acts more accountable."

A brutal homicide in Lyon Township last year spurred Law to look into the change. Christopher Lucas was sentenced in November to 60 to 100 years in prison after an Oakland County jury convicted him of second-degree murder in the stomping death of his girlfriend's mother, Martha Wallace, 45. Lucas left imprints of his shoe on Wallace's face, Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said.

"It's got to stop," Bouchard said.

Lucas had been charged with first-degree murder but the jury decided it was not a deliberate or premeditated attack and convicted him of the lesser charge, making the 25-year-old eligible for parole when he is 85.

Beth Morrison, president and CEO of the domestic violence organization HAVEN, said someone is killed every three days by domestic violence in Michigan. Recent high-profile cases where local men have been accused of killing their wives, including Stephen Grant and Roger Sweet, are dominating headlines, she said, but most domestic violence cases do not receive such attention.

"The bottom line for all of us is and should be that abuse is wrong, it happens every day and it should be stopped," she said.

Contact **KORIE WILKINS** at 248-351-5186 or kwilkins@freepress.com.

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March 13, 2007

Bill seeks life terms in spousal killings

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

On the heels of several high-profile murders, a state lawmaker plans to introduce a bill today that would put people convicted of killing their domestic partner behind bars for life.

Many people who murder an intimate partner are paroled after serving the minimum sentence, typically 20 years. This is because they are often convicted of second-degree murder because it is difficult to prove premeditation for a first-degree murder charge, according to bill sponsor Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township.

The bill creates a stricter punishment by allowing prosecutors to charge domestic violence murder suspects with first-degree felony murder, which carries a penalty of life without parole. If passed, the legislation would put domestic violence on par with other felony murders that have underlying crimes such as armed robbery, rape, child abuse or larceny.

"We're hoping this keeps them in jail for a long time," Law said.

The bill was inspired by Lyon Township resident Christopher Lucas, who was convicted in November of second-degree murder after stomping his girlfriend's mother to death. At the time, the 25-year-old Lucas was hoping to get out of prison after serving two decades but the judge handed him a minimum sentence of 60 years.

The bill also comes on the heels of several recent high-profile domestic murders. Washington Township Stephen Grant confessed last week to the murder of his wife, Tara. Last week, Harper Woods resident Patricia Anne Brimhall was killed when police say her ex-husband, Jon, barged into her home and shot her. Marlene Francis Sweet's husband, Roger Sweet, was charged last week for her 1990 death. Earlier this month, Hamburg Township resident Nancy Lowenbergh died of a gunshot wound after her husband, John, set their home on fire and then shot himself, police said.

Advocates for domestic violence victims welcomed the proposed legislation even though it wouldn't necessarily save lives in the future.

"It's one more tool to hold accountable those who commit domestic violence murder," said Beth Morrison, president and CEO of HAVEN, the Oakland County agency that works to end domestic violence and sexual assault. "It adds additional accountability."

An estimated 100 people commit domestic violence homicides every year, according to the Michigan Resource Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

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Bill offers tougher sentencing in domestic violence

Of The Oakland Press

A bill will be introduced in the state House today that could bring domestic violence up to the level of armed robbery, rape or larceny when someone is killed.

Citing the stomping death of Martha Wallace in Lyon Township in August and the recent death of Tara Grant in Macomb County, state Rep. David Law, RCommerce Township, announced on Monday a bill he will introduce today that could make domestic violence a crime that leads to felony murder.

If successful, the result will be to make the most severe punishment in Michigan's law - mandatory life without parole in prison - easier to obtain in murder cases.

"There was clearly, we felt, a void in the law," said Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard.

Felony murder arises when someone commits second-degree murder - intending to kill but without premeditation and deliberation - when committing another felony.

Only specific felonies apply to the felony murder statute, including armed robbery, first-degree criminal sexual conduct, first-degree child abuse, arson and larceny.

Without felony murder, prosecutors must prove premeditation, which can be a difficult hurdle, especially in domestic cases involving rage.

Christopher Lucas, 25, admitted killing his girlfriend's mother, Wallace, 45, on Aug. 15 inside the home they shared by stomping her head at least five times so hard that his boot print was visible on her face. But jurors could not find that he premeditated the killing, and they convicted him of second-degree murder, giving him the possibility of parole.

Lucas was sentenced to at least 60 years in prison after the judge noted the brutality of the case and exceeded the guidelines. But Lucas faced a minimum term that could be as low as 24 years in prison.

"That sentence leaves the possibility for parole," Law said. "Domestic violence should be on the list of offenses that if they are committed and death results, first-degree felony murder should apply."

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca said that it would have been easier to convict Lucas of first-degree murder with the felony murder statute, which would ensure keeping a dangerous person from ever finding freedom.

Gorcyca said this change would be "closing a loophole" that favors dangerous abusers. The prosecutor noted that deaths resulting from thefts or breaking-and-entering crimes result in first-degree felony murder.

"It is common sense," Gorcyca said. "It will hold those who commit domestic violence and kill accountable."

One recent case shows how juries can consider such cases.

Three years ago, a Novi woman - Nikole Frederick, now 27 - was convicted of felony murder

in the torture death of 2-year-old Ann Marie Shawley.

The jurors in her trial convicted her of second-degree murder for the charge regarding premeditation, but they found her guilty of first-degree murder for the felony murder charge of first-degree child abuse.

Prosecutors may charge two different theories - felony murder and premeditated murder - for the same crime, and after a verdict, one count is dismissed.

Critics, such as defense attorney Jerome Sabbota, have said that expanding the felony murder statute takes away from having juries decide cases. He said that though the jury convicted Lucas of the lesser charge, the judge noted the brutality and exceeded guidelines.

But Oakland County Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick, who sentenced Lucas, said it is time for the law to change.

"It's a good idea," Sosnick said of Law's proposal. "It seems by now we should realize there is a strong connection between domestic violence and homicide."

The sheriff said the level of violence seen in some cases, such as Lucas', shows a need for toughening the laws.

"Given the brutality of some of these, it makes sense," Bouchard said. "The violence is stunning."

Domestic violence becomes a felony on the third offense or when there is a serious injury, which is when the proposed felony murder statute change would apply.

Relationships between attacker and victim include dating, sexual, spouse or former spouse, housemate, related by marriage or having a child in common.

"Hopefully, we will get it voted on in the next couple of months," Law said.

Contact Stephen Frye at (248) 745-4634 or steve.frye@oakpress.com.

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Family: System failed shooter

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

ERIN ALBERTY

THE SAGINAW NEWS

COLEMAN -- Not long after Marie Turner buried her son, David, on Monday afternoon, she and her family were trying to unravel what made the Coleman 17-year-old shoot his estranged girlfriend and then turn the gun on himself.

"You want answers, but nobody wants to give them," Turner said.

In the hours before David shot himself in the head Wednesday in the parking lot of Dow High School in Midland, his mother saw him pacing frantically around their manufactured home, talking to himself and insisting he didn't want her "to know his business," she said.

"As far as the rage that morning, I'd never seen anything like that," she said. "He was walking the floors like a mad person."

The family believes he was angry over Internet gossip about his relationship with Jessica Forsyth, 17, whom David Turner dated on and off for five months before he shot her four times with his mother's .44 Magnum handgun.

But Turner said her son's problems were long simmering as he drifted in and out of detention and care centers, and she believes the state missed chances to help. He grew more impatient when he stopped taking his medication for bipolar disorder two or three months ago, she said.

She said she then asked his state-appointed therapist if her son had undergone a psychological evaluation. The therapist did not know, she said.

She said she also notified probation officials of her son's new problems, to which an officer responded he was not a "baby-sitter," she said.

"We believe we should be looking more at David's treatment and the system that failed him," Turner's fiancé, Scott Dark wrote in a press statement on the family's behalf.

"David was thrown into detention centers, youth centers and jail, passed from one therapist to another, one probation officer to another, always detained but never really helped."

David Turner's brushes with the law included a weapons charge in July. In December, he received a sentence of 18 months of probation for stealing guns.

Relatives say he suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiant disorder -- persistent anger and disruptive behavior -- and he struggled with the deaths of his father and grandfather in the past few years, the statement indicated.

Family members also offered their "sincerest apologies" to Forsyth and her family.

"We deeply regret David's actions. We are praying for Jessica and hoping for her full recovery."

Hospital staff discharged Forsyth on Saturday.

Turner said a relative of Forsyth's called to say she wanted to attend David Turner's funeral Monday, "but it was too emotional."

"It was recorded especially for her," Turner said.

About 50 people attended the memorial service in Clare, Turner said. v

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

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MORNING SUN

Victim needs a plan

By [ROSEMARY HORVATH](#)

Sun Staff Writer

A victim of domestic violence who isn't ready to escape the pain today or next year can still have a personal safety plan to use if the day comes.

A victim faces the worst danger at the moment of escape. A plan helps a victim identify her or his limits.

"If a victim has a checklist, she would know when she could leave and be safe," Sgt. Michele Hernandez said. "It gives a victim control. The abuser needs the victim to feel fear, or else they won't have the power of control anymore."

Hernandez, an expert in prevention services at Michigan State Police headquarters in Lansing, trains road troopers and police on taking domestic violence complaints.

A safety plan can be as simple as storing a packed suitcase at a friend's house. Or it can be as detailed as knowing where to find a new job.

"The question to answer is what would you take if this were the last time you came in that house," Hernandez said. "A victim can't just pack up the kids and pets and go to a shelter."

Having a credit card or a separate bank account in your name only are practical precautions. Be aware that these items and their monthly statements may be difficult to hide. Storing cash at a friend's house might be better.

"Some people are so scared they are afraid to write anything down," Hernandez said. "But getting your records in order and storing them in a safe place is a good idea. A lot of times an abuser will destroy what's left at home of his victim."

Legal advocate Mary Anne Henry at Women's Aid Service helps people prepare safety plans.

"It's the one very practical and very important thing people can do," she said.

Women's Aid Service provides domestic violence services in Gratiot, Isabella and Clare counties. These services include a 24-hour crisis line, emergency shelter and supportive services, and individual and group counseling for shelter and non-shelter adults and child victims. It also offers legal advocacy and batterers' intervention.

Some situations are more serious and call for emergency interaction by police. Other situations may have a victim only wanting to talk to a confidante.

A spouse may feel emotionally imprisoned and hopeless. Detached from society, she (or in some cases, he) may see her situation as unique and one no one else could understand or have solutions for.

State law defines domestic violence as a pattern of learned behavior. A predator may use physical, sexual and emotional abuse to control another.

Using domination to control is a misdemeanor crime punishable by up to 93 days in jail and/or a \$500 fine.

The Michigan State Police Uniform Crime Report counted 54,258 reported victims and 30 reported murders related to domestic violence in 2004.

Under Michigan law, a person has a domestic relationship if she/he is a spouse or former spouse, is in or out of a dating relationship, has a child in common with the person, or is a resident or former resident of the same household.

Hernandez said more victims are reporting domestic violence crime. Communities are less tolerant of the crime, she said.

Not all victims who feel emotionally imprisoned are empowered.

"A person in an abusive relationship is often fearful of reporting abuse for a variety of reasons," Henry said. "They worry that they might make things worse."

Women's Aid Service counsels people ready to end abusive relationships, as well as people who are not planning to leave at all.

"We are here for them as a source of support and will help them in any way we can," Henry said. "We do not judge or condemn them for doing whatever they feel is best for them."

In preparing a safety plan, a victim decides under what circumstances is it too much. Hernandez and Henry both said only a victim can determine the breaking point.

Henry has met women and men "who have incredibly good survival skills," she said. "They survive against sometimes huge odds and additional and overwhelming circumstances in their lives that make it difficult to get even their most basic of needs met."

Women's Aid Services also help victims explore the dynamics of an abusive relationship and to explore options.

A Mt. Pleasant shelter provides space for overnight stays for women and their children from the three counties.

Trained staff members and volunteers manage the facility. Food, linens and towels and clothing are provided if needed.

The agency also has offices and daytime shelters in Alma, Mt. Pleasant and Clare.

If the Mt. Pleasant shelter has an overflow, Women's Aid can find space at other shelters. Transportation is provided to help people find jobs and get kids to school.

Temporary shelter is provided to men in abusive relationships, an area motel until other arrangements can be made.

"I have worked with numerous men," Henry said. "I would say probably on average at least one per month."

Telephone numbers for Women's Aid Service crisis lines are 772-9168 for Isabella County; 463-6014 for Gratiot County; and 539-1046 for Clare County.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/031307/loc_domestic001.shtml



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Published March 13, 2007

Homicide suspect, wife met at Cedar Village

Tara Grant had eye on far horizons, slain woman's friends say

By Ben Schmitt, Jack Kresnak,
Jim Schaefer And Joe Swickard

PERKINS - All kids dream. Tara Lynn Destrampe bundled hers in a plan.

"Make enough money to buy everything I want," she said in her 1990 high school senior yearbook. "Live in a big house with a Jaguar parked in the garage and some day get married and have a small family."

Tara never forgot her Upper Peninsula roots, but friends say she had her eye on far horizons.

"She was just a small-town girl like all of us," said Julie Koski, one of Tara's best friends in high school. "She had big aspirations."

Tara builds a career

For a time, she was striding through the world as easily as she strode through high school. She graduated from Michigan State University, married a college friend - Stephen Grant, from Detroit's suburbs - and spun an entry-level marketing job into an international career.

By 2007, Tara Grant, mother of two with a comfy home in Washington Township, was an executive for a global engineering firm.

She had come a long way from the one-stoplight town 15 miles north of Escanaba.

Now, a week after police found her torso in the garage of her home, the people of Perkins still are agast at the thought that Stephen Grant allegedly strangled and dismembered her last month.

While she is remembered as the golden hometown girl, Stephen - in the Macomb County jail on a first-degree murder charge - is recalled as a guy who couldn't quite shake his reputation as an impulsive showoff.

A college dropout who claimed a degree, he wound up working for his father in their two-man



(Photo by Associated Press file photo)

Marking off the scene: On March 4, tape placed by law enforcement officials blocks off the home of Tara and Stephen Grant on West Ridge Drive in Washington Township. Stephen Grant is charged with first-degree murder in his wife's death. He allegedly strangled her and dismembered her body last month.

Related content from LSJ:

- [Tara Grant's remains to be preserved](#)

machine shop in Mt. Clemens and being the only dad at the school bus stop while Tara worked on mega-million-dollar proposals overseas.

He played the role of big shot, said Tara's aunt, Carla Lanaville, 49. "And now we're finding out it was only in his head," she said.

School days

In Perkins, Tara went by the nicknames of Gumshoe, Felix and Terrible.

"We used code names in grade school when we wrote little notes to each other and threw them across the room," Koski said.

Pat Nelson, who taught Tara in Sunday school at Bethany Lutheran Church in Perkins, described her as attentive and well-liked.

In contrast to his wife, Stephen Grant was recalled last week as a quirky kid who often concocted outlandish cover stories.

Paul Buss, a high school buddy, now 36, said Stephen was a car guy. "He was really into high-quality cars, Ferraris and Porsches, stuff like that," he said.

Buss said Stephen "was pretty smart," a "very intelligent guy," but was tripped up by a tendency to "exaggerate the truth in a lot of things. "That would get him in trouble," Buss said.

Lives cross

The lives of Tara Destrampe and Stephen Grant crossed at the Cedar Village apartments near Michigan State University's campus, where both lived in 1994.

She was finishing her degree in marketing and working for a jewelry store. He was working for state Sen. Jack Faxon. Stephen maintained he'd graduated, but it wasn't so. MSU said he entered as a junior from another school and left a couple of terms later as a junior.

Stephen was taken with Tara, his smart, pretty neighbor. Determined to catch her attention, Stephen staged one of his "watch this" moments after Tara's grandmother, Mary Jane Destrampe, died in 1994. Tara had gone to be with her family.

Stephen walked into the Crawford Funeral Home unannounced and unexpected. He had driven to Escanaba as a declaration of affection. The whole thing seemed over the top, said Lanaville.

They grew closer, moving in together in 1995 and marrying the next year. By then, she had started working in an entry-level marketing position at the Troy office of Washington Group International, an engineering giant based in Idaho. She rose steadily.

When it appeared Washington Group was going to build an auto plant in Russia in 2005, Tara was assigned to the project and the family was set to relocate to Europe. Stephen has insisted it was a great opportunity.

Not so, said Buss.

"I know he wasn't very happy about that at all," he said. "It fell through. He did not want to go overseas."

Then last October, Tara was given a temporary assignment overseeing an office in Puerto Rico. The job was taxing: She worked there Monday through Friday, and flew home for the weekends.

About that time, Buss said, he stopped talking to Stephen. He was overbearing.

"Why? He's always had this personality where he has to be the center of everything," Buss said. "He was sure of himself. Narcissistic is a good word for it. He was always right, no matter what."

Tara reported missing

Last month, on Valentine's Day, Stephen walked into the Macomb County Sheriff's Office. He said his wife had not been seen since she walked out on him Feb. 9, when they argued about her planned return to Puerto Rico that Sunday - a full day early.

He said he hadn't reported her missing earlier because she might just be steamed at him. Besides, he said, he'd checked with her family and co-workers who'd counseled waiting.

Last weekend, the high-profile case exploded as sheriff's investigators searched his home and discovered the torso. Stephen, as they searched, slipped away, taking his dog for a walk. He kept on going until authorities captured him 36 hours later after a chase through Wilderness State Park near the Mackinac Bridge.

In the Upper Peninsula where Tara grew up, childhood friends and neighbors shudder at each new revelation and wish for what might have been.

Hanson, who grew up with Tara, said her friend sent her a Christmas card and planned to visit this month to tap maple trees her family's place in the woods. They planned to take Tara's children riding on Hanson's pony.

"But we never got to go," she said. "I can't imagine that she saw any of this coming. Because she would have taken those kids and ran."

Contact Joe Swickard at (313) 222-8769 or jswickard@freepress.com.

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Published March 13, 2007

Tara Grant's remains to be preserved

Related content from LSJ:

- Homicide suspect, wife met at Cedar Village

By Jeff Karoub
Associated Press

ROMEO - The remains of a slain Detroit-area woman and the crime scene both will be preserved for one more week under an agreement reached Monday by prosecutors and attorneys representing the woman's husband, who is accused in her death and the mutilation of her corpse.

Lawyers for Stephen Grant sought the extension so defense experts could conduct their own tests in preparation for Grant's trial on charges of first-degree murder and dismemberment of a body.

The agreement was reached Monday and formalized when District Court Judge Denis LeDuc signed it during a Romeo hearing.

Grant was arraigned last week in the death of Tara Lynn Grant, 34, a businesswoman and mother of two who last was seen alive Feb. 9. Stephen Grant reported his wife missing to authorities five days later.

Stephen Grant disappeared March 2 after investigators began searching the couple's home in Washington Township. Investigators found Tara Grant's torso in the garage. Other body parts turned up in a nearby park. He was captured 36 hours later.

Grant faces a preliminary examination March 20.

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March 13, 2007

Roseville

Building a one-stop homeless shop

Macomb Co. team hopes to use grant, raise \$2.5M

Jim Lynch / The Detroit News

ROSEVILLE -- Macomb County homeless advocates are hoping to use federal funding to jump-start creation of a one-stop center for homeless services.

The Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team, based in Roseville, is hoping to use a \$770,000 federal housing grant to consolidate services that now are being offered at various churches throughout the county.

To make the project a reality, MCREST will soon begin a fundraising drive with a goal of \$2.5 million.

The money would be used to add:

- A Safe Haven unit -- a living quarters on the second floor for 25 chronically mentally ill clients.

- Commercial kitchen and laundry units to provide vocational training.

- Office space for several government agencies to use to provide assistance, including Community Mental Health, Department of Human Services and the Social Security Administration.

"We're going to be looking for sponsorship partners from the community -- from commercial and industrial sources, as well as residents," said Jimetta Lewis, MCREST's executive director.

For Scott Varney, 40, who has found himself homeless after separating from his wife, the idea of a central location makes perfect sense.

These days, he's getting around by using the bus.

"The people here are the greatest," he said. "Without them, I'd be surviving, but it wouldn't be pretty."

Many in the community are already aware of the problem.

Last week, William Crouchman, chairman of Macomb County's board of commissioners, made the homeless issue a focus of his state-of-the-county speech.

"It exists everywhere, it is increasing, but we can do something to help," he said.

In recent years, Macomb County's homeless population has risen by about 100 people annually.

Two years ago, the county's homeless count stood at 947, including 208 children. Earlier this year, the county's estimate was 1,147, with 200 children.

"This project is absolutely needed," said Carrie Fortune, Macomb County's homeless coordinator.

"We know it works perfectly to bring the agencies to the client instead of having to issue clients bus tickets to get all over the county," she said.

You can reach Jim Lynch at (586) 468-0520 or jlynch@detnews.com.

How to help

Those interested in contributing to the MCREST project can:

- Send donations to the Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team, 20415 Erin, Roseville, MI 48066.

- Call Jimetta Lewis, MCREST executive director, at (586) 415-5107.

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03/12/2007

Homeless count grows

By [Tony Lascari](#), Midland Daily News

Leaders hope a survey showing 219 Midland County residents were homeless on Jan. 25 will spark change in the community.

The point-in-time survey was conducted by the Midland County Continuum of Care. It indicates an increase in the number of homeless by 29 since the group's last count in October 2005.

Sharon Mortensen, continuum chairperson, said the organization wants to form a housing resource center that would centralize the community's efforts to meet all kinds of housing needs.

It also plans to continue hosting focus groups with homeless people every three months.

"We want to make sure we keep our fingers on the pulse of what's really happening," she said.

Continuum member Amy Olson of the United Way's First Call for Help, which handles phone calls for human-service needs, said the number of rent help requests rose in 2006 compared with 2005.

"People are always struggling with their rents and with layoffs," she said. "People are losing their jobs all the time, and we have seen some of that."

The increase in the homeless count could be due partially to the winter weather increasing needs, as well as the group improving its count technique, Mortensen said.

As executive director of the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault or Shelterhouse, she knows the demand is high for support agencies in the county.

"Pretty much every time we've done a count our shelters are maxed out," she said.

Olson said the survey is conducted using forms sent to all United Way agencies, schools, churches, shelters, the court system and more to count people who do not have an identified place to stay within seven days.

The group tries to avoid double counting people by collecting first initials and birth dates on forms.

"We do the best we can to see where we're at on that day so we can get money for other housing options," Olson said.

The continuum will likely look for volunteers who could assist agencies in collecting demographic information for future counts, she said.

The count does not include people who stay with friends or family if they anticipate staying there for more than seven days.

"We see a lot of that in Midland because of the rural-type homelessness," Olson said.

The continuum hopes to address those housing struggles as well, she said.

Mortensen said the continuum will work toward implementing goals in its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. A housing needs committee will see what obstacles people face and how to address them, and then look at funding availability.



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Published March 13, 2007

Towers: Best use of Oliver building isn't as homeless shelter

A Lansing State Journal editorial

A coalition of church and faith groups is urging the city of Lansing to sell the vacant Oliver Towers building so it can be used for the homeless.

Anytime groups or individuals step forward to aid the less fortunate, it's good news for our community.

That doesn't make Oliver Towers a good site for such altruism.

In fact, the building's location, at Ionia Street and Capital Avenue in the heart of downtown, is far more important as a site of development than as a site for charitable assistance.

Joan Jackson Johnson, who heads up social service efforts for the city, has made the argument in these pages that putting 100 homeless people into one facility is not good homeless policy. She argues that a decentralized approach is best, with smaller groups scattered about the area.

Justin Sleight, representing the faith group, argues the opposite - that the facility will work just fine in complementing other assistance efforts.

But even if Sleight's perspective is correct, that doesn't make Oliver Towers the best choice.

First, there's the location.

Large parcels of land downtown are rare; their potential uses many. Mayor Virg Bernero wants the site for a merged downtown library and Impression 5 museum, for example.

Or the land could be useful for a mixed development, with housing targeted at Lansing Community College students, along with office and retail space.

At any rate, the land should be redeveloped, not lightly renovated.

Second, there's the issue of money.

The faith alliance says it will raise up to \$3 million privately to buy and renovate Oliver Towers. That's a sizable commitment in these days when demand on charitable efforts is high and jobs are short.

Assuming the funds are raised, would such an investment be fully utilized?

Last month, the city received a letter from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development wondering why all its existing homeless housing wasn't being utilized. The HUD letter

ends with a not so subtle reference to future federal funding decisions in light of local vacancies.

This community can do more for the homeless. In fact, this debate should serve to foster tighter public-private links to provide such services.

We just don't see Oliver Towers as the best hub for such work.

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Agency shuts down facility

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

By Keith Roberts

kroberts@citpat.com -- 768-4922

Florence Crittenton Services is acting to avoid a repeat of last summer's financial troubles by laying off a handful of workers and leaving one of its locations.

On Thursday, the nonprofit's transitional program for girls will move from 521 Wildwood Ave. to 1603 Lansing Ave.

Homeless girls will remain on Wildwood Avenue. On April 1, homeless boys will move there from a building the agency rents at 320

Orange St. Florence Crittenton will leave the Orange Street location.

The agency's re-entry program at 924 Fleming Ave. was also eliminated Dec. 31 due to state budget cuts. The program offered counseling and services to young people returning to Jackson from residential facilities.

Executive Director Bob Powell said the moves will cost the agency two full-time and five part-time staff members, but they will save about \$25,000 a year and keep the programs intact.

"I want the community to know the options are still out there for them," Powell said.

Florence Crittenton provides the only juvenile-delinquent program for mothers in the state but has faced funding cuts because of the state budget crisis.

Powell said he expects more cuts this year to the agency's \$1.5 million budget.

Last summer, the agency lost \$70,000 in state funding and was late in paying its 50 employees. To avoid a repeat, the agency's board had several strategic planning sessions.

"This is not reactionary," Powell said. "It's been well thought-out."

Board President Michelle Woods said the board did

its best to minimize the damage.

"We are going to do everything we can to keep the programs as they are and probably even make them better," Woods said. "Once everything is in place, I'm sure it will run very efficiently."

The agency owns the Lansing and Wildwood avenue buildings and rents the Orange Street building for \$715 a month.

The residential program at Lansing Avenue for mothers ages 12 to 18 and their babies has room for 18 mothers, but averages about 12.

The transitional program for girls at Wildwood Avenue has room for six mothers ages 16 to 19 and their

babies. It is usually full.

Having all the mothers and their babies at Lansing Avenue will help keep the facility at full capacity, Powell said.

The agency usually has two homeless girls at Wildwood Avenue and four homeless boys at Orange Street. Boys and girls will be on separate floors when both are at Wildwood, Powell said.

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Unusual adoptions work wonders for Lansing family

March 13, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

LANSING -- Seventeen-year-old Effrem Grettenberger was in grade school when he learned how to deal with the schoolyard taunt "Your mamma!"

"I turn it to my advantage," Effrem said during lunch last week at the Lansing City Market. "They say, 'Your mamma!' I ask them, 'Which one you talking about?' "

Effrem has two mothers; they are lesbian partners and former foster parents who adopted Effrem and three other children.

The kids -- Effrem; his brother Paul, 18; his cousin Antonio, also 18, and Antonio's sister Ashley, 17 -- began life with serious deficits stemming from neglect in their birth families' homes in Detroit and then frequent changes of schools. Now, they are excelling in school and a variety of outside activities.

In 1998, the three boys were the first foster children for Lansing social workers Susan Grettenberger and Mary Boudreau, who became licensed foster parents intending to adopt children.

The couple, who have been in a committed relationship for more than 15 years, expected to get small children and were ready with a crib and toddler bed when a foster care agency in Detroit asked them to take in three boys ages 8-10 for the weekend. The boys never saw their biological parents again.

"I remember feeling utter confusion at first," Effrem said of the time when he was taken to Lansing. "I'd never been out of the house before and all I knew was I was now living in a home with two white women."

Effrem and his siblings are African American.

Boudreau, 45, said the boys were behind in school and social activities.

"One of the best things we did was we taught them to swim right away," Boudreau said. "At first they were really afraid. They had been told that they would drown."

None of the boys even had ridden a bike. Male friends and relatives of the two women stepped in to be role models for the boys.

"When we first got here, Mary and Susan suspected that we might need a father figure," said Antonio, now a student at Lansing Community College. Two of their mothers' male friends "showed us how men acted," Antonio said.

In 2001 and 2002, Grettenberger adopted the three boys and Ashley through the Ingham County Family Court.

Though Michigan law prohibits adoptions by two parents of the same gender, a judge in another county in 2003 interpreted the law differently and allowed Boudreau to also adopt the four children. There are more than a dozen other gay or lesbian partners in the Lansing area who have become joint adoptive parents despite the legal hurdles, said Grettenberger, 51.

Ashley is a junior at Lansing Eastern High School and plays soccer and runs track, though she doesn't like to do it in cold weather. "I prefer a little heat that I don't have to make myself," she said.

Effrem, a junior, and Paul, a senior, are in Lansing Eastern's production of "Guys & Dolls" the weekend of March 23. Both plan to go to college. Paul wants to be a psychologist and plans to attend Central Michigan University.

"Verbally, our parents said they loved us but they never did anything," Effrem said of the biological parents. "And then we moved here, we did things like take a trip to Montana. We got involved in a lot of things and we had a tutor to catch up in school.

"It's little things like that. Susan and Mary showed that they cared about the progress we were making."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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Community effort provides neighbors food relief

By Sally Barber, Cadillac News

TUSTIN — In some communities, being a good neighbor is a way of life. Tustin is one of those rare towns.

Nowhere is it evidenced more clearly than in the operation of the local food pantry. At the Northwest Osceola Food Pantry there is never a shortage of volunteers and the emergency food supply is always available for neighbors in need.

A staff of 20 regular volunteers keeps the doors open at the pantry, located at Augustana Lutheran Church.

"We have a really supportive group, said Nickie Crumb, pantry president. "I have a hard time finding a slot to sign up to work."

Open every Monday, and available to meet emergency needs, the pantry distributed 1,264 bags of groceries in 2006 servicing 951 people from six townships extending from Ashton to Marion.

While clients vary from those who have lost jobs and single moms trying to stretch their dollars, the fastest growing need is among older citizens, Crumb said.

"They would rather starve than come in," she said. "It's hard for them to resolve their need, but we are seeing more of them having to do that with food prices going up and fixed incomes not going anywhere."

The pantry is supported by grants from United Way and FEMA, as well as local churches, schools, businesses and individuals.

"We have never been at a loss for food to give to people," Crumb said.

Neighborliness seems to come natural to local residents who collect cash and food donations year-round. Others contribute from their bounty as their situations allow.

"We have people donate their farm fresh eggs and produce from their garden," Crumb said.

The generosity is not lost on those who depend on the pantry to see them through hardship.

"There are volunteers and those who bring in things on a regular basis because a few years ago they were going through a hard time and received help from the pantry," Crumb said.

Barb Hazlett, vice president of the pantry board, has been volunteering her time to the effort since 1997. For her, helping out neighbors is not just a community mission; it's a personal matter.

"There are so many people out there that need help," she said. "It's important to me to see everyone has food and other necessities."

For more information about the Northwest Osceola Food Pantry, call (231) 829-5483.

Your local connection

Northwest Osceola Food Pantry:

- Location: Augustana Lutheran Church, 18499 20 Mile Road., Tustin
- Hours: Mondays 9 a.m. until noon
- Service area: Sherman, Burdell, LeRoy, Rose Lake, Lincoln and Cedar townships
- Food emergencies: (231) 829-5483
- Donations: To make donations of cash, food or personal care products, call (231) 829-5483

sbarber@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

Published: Saturday, March 10, 2007

Low-income households may be eligible for tax exemption

By SUE LATUSZEK

Alpena News

Residents in low-income households may be exempt from property taxes and don't even know it.

"We've gone from about a dozen a few years ago to over 40," Jeff Shea, Alpena city assessor, said of the number of poverty exemptions in the city. The amount has grown as more people become aware of the exemption.

To qualify, an application along with proof of income must be submitted each year to the board of review. The federal government sets poverty income standards, which are the lowest income levels a local government unit may use in determining a poverty exemption.

However, the income level may be set higher. An asset level also is set, and local entities may require additional tests they feel appropriate.

Shea said Alpena uses the federal poverty income standards that are determined each year. Applicants may only have \$30,000 of assets other than their residence and may not own another property.

"If they qualify, they get 100 percent exemption," said Shea.

If one doesn't qualify for a full exemption, Shea said it is possible to qualify for a partial exemption.

"Just because you're over income doesn't mean don't apply," he said.

The exemption does not apply to special assessments, however, such as the city's sidewalk program.

"Special assessments are levied under a different act," Shea said. "The poverty exemption just applies to property taxes. (People) can still lose their property if they don't pay their special assessments."

Although initially issued as a one-time fee, Shea said special assessment payments are automatically spread over five years if not paid up front. A special provision was placed

into the sidewalk program which spreads the assessment payments out over 10 years, if the homeowner wishes.

To be placed on the city's mailing list for the poverty exemption application, residents may contact the assessor's office at 354-1700. Alpena Board of Review dates and times are March 12-14 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. and 2-5 p.m. and March 15 from 3-9 p.m.

Sue Latuszek can be reached via e-mail at **slatuszek@thealpenanews.com** or by phone at 354-3111 ext. 341.



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Published March 13, 2007

Analysts call on Michigan to solve budget crisis soon

Report: State only one with negative credit outlook

By Kathy Barks Hoffman
Associated Press

On the Web

- Standard & Poor's: <http://www2.standardandpoors.com>
- Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>
- Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop:
[http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senators/Bishop.asp?](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senators/Bishop.asp?District=12)
District=12

LANSING - Investment analysts warned Monday that Michigan's governor and lawmakers must fix the state's budget crisis quickly or risk even lower ratings and a bleaker outlook.

According to a report by Standard & Poor's Rating Service, Michigan is the only state with a negative credit outlook. It faces massive shortfalls in its current and upcoming budgets and hasn't passed a replacement for the Single Business Tax, which brings in nearly \$2 billion annually and expires at the end of the year.

"Michigan's credit outlook could be revised to stable if the legislature passes a tax reform package and addresses the remainder of the structural imbalance in the fiscal 2008 budget," Managing Director James Wiemken says in the report. "From a credit perspective, this is probably the most important legislative session in more than a decade."

S&P downgraded Michigan's rating from "AA" to "negative" last year after lawmakers repealed the Single Business Tax and failed to put a replacement tax in place. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm has offered a replacement tax but Senate Republicans don't like it and have drafted their own plan. Neither has made it out of committee.

Granholm also wants to put a 2 percent tax on most services except education and health care starting June 1, the latest date she says the tax would raise enough revenue to balance this year's budget.

On Monday, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and Michigan Association of Realtors unveiled a 30-second television ad criticizing the proposed tax on services, saying it "will hit every family pocketbook and every job provider in Michigan."

The ad is being seen only in Ingham County - the area around Lansing - on cable television stations. Tricia Kinley of the Michigan Chamber said the ad may run elsewhere, but didn't say whether the groups will spend the far larger amounts needed to air the ad on network TV stations or in the Grand Rapids, Flint and Detroit areas.

Although the idea of raising taxes has been criticized by Republicans and even some Democrats, the S&P report supports the governor's proposed budget and tax reform package - or some variation that includes a tax increase.

It notes that the ratings company has not downgraded the state even further in the face of a \$900 million shortfall in the current budget and a \$1 billion deficit in the next because the Granholm proposal addresses the state's structural deficit in the next budget year and "moves the state's revenue base over a broader and more stable part of the economy."

"If the state passes a tax reform and budget package that addresses the current imbalance in a timely manner, the outlook could return to stable," the report said. "By failing to place the service tax (or some other measure that creates sustainable balance) in working order by June 1, the state could render substantial parts of the two-year recovery plan insufficient."

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- [Bill Would End Medicaid and SCHIP Waiting Period for Legal Immigrant Children](#)
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- [ACF Proposes Child Care Error Rate System](#)
- [APHSA Sets Tentative Dates for Rescheduled Spring Conference](#)

APHSA Members Address New TANF Mandates at Ways and Means Hearing

On March 6, the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support conducted an oversight hearing on the Deficit Reduction Act provisions that reauthorized the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and amended the child support enforcement law. The subcommittee members heard testimony from Sidonie Squier, director of the Office of Family Assistance at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Robin Arnold-Williams, secretary of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services; David Hansell, acting commissioner, New York State Department of Temporary Disability Assistance; Nancy Ford, administrator, Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services; Mary Dean Harvey, director of the Georgia Department of Human Resources' Division of Family and Children; and Bruce Wagstaff, director, Sacramento County (Calif.) Department of Human Assistance. During the question and answer period, Squier indicated that she anticipated that the final TANF rule implementing the DRA provisions would be issued in September 2007, although she was not at liberty to comment on the contents of the rule. Squier noted that she sympathized with states regarding the tight timeframe for implementation of the new rule, citing her past experience as a state TANF program administrator. However, she did not indicate any intention to delay the implementation period. When asked about the proposal to allow states to receive partial credit for hours of work performed by clients below the 30-hour required threshold, Squier stated the Administration's opposition to such a proposal. Members of the subcommittee asked state panelists about the work definitions; the application of TANF rules to state maintenance-of-effort funded programs; the adequacy of TANF funding for high population growth states; the adequacy of child care funding; the status of TANF reserves; the loss of states' ability to match IV-D funding with child support incentive funds; and the need to extend implementation dates for the newly enacted work verification provisions. Several of the American Public Human Services Association members who testified called on Congress to let all states maintain separate state-funded programs; to clarify work definitions to allow job search and job readiness activities to be conducted in combination with other work activities; to allow states more flexibility to serve TANF clients with multiple barriers to employment; and to delay implementation of the new work verification requirements and related penalties. It is unclear at this time what legislation the subcommittee may consider in these areas, but Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) plans to reintroduce legislation to restore the ability of states to use child support incentive funds to match federal IV-D funds. The DRA prohibited the use of incentive funds as match. Several panelists endorsed the restoration of the child support incentive fund match. APHSA also submitted for the record a copy of the recent letter sent to HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt from APHSA's affiliate organization, the National Association of State TANF Administrators, that called for changes to the recently issued work verification guidance. [Hearing testimony is available here.](#)

House Appropriations Panel Questions CSBG and SSBG Cuts

On March 8, the House Appropriations Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee held a hearing on proposed fiscal year 2008 appropriations for programs under the jurisdiction of the Administration for Children and Families. Congressional members at the hearing included Ranking Member James Walsh (R-N.Y.), Michael Honda (D-Calif.), Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. (D-Ill.), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Tim Ryan (R-Ohio), and Ralph Regula (R-Ohio). The witness for the hearing was Daniel Schneider, principal deputy assistant secretary at ACF. Subcommittee members questioned Schneider about the president's request to eliminate funding for the Community Services Block Grant and decrease funding by \$500 million for the Social Services Block Grant. The subcommittee also posed questions about the funding requests for Head Start, the Child Care Development Fund, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Refugee and Unaccompanied Minors programs, abstinence-only education, the nursing home visiting program, foster care interstate home studies, electronic records for children in foster care, the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program, and programs for Native Americans. Schneider said the FY 2008 budget request included an increase in ACF staffing funds, primarily for the Improper Payments Initiative focused on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, child care, and foster care.

House Agriculture Appropriations Members Express Concerns over Food Stamp Contracting and Nutrition Issues

On March 8, the House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee reviewed the administration's FY 2008 budget request for the Food and Nutrition Service. Those testifying for the administration included U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Nancy Johner; Kate Coler, USDA deputy undersecretary; and Roberto Salazar, FNS administrator. The subcommittee's chair, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), concentrated many of her questions on the pending startup of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration's contract for its eligibility modernization project, which would contract out certain eligibility function for the Food Stamp Program and other assistance programs. Citing such contracts as her "top concern," Rep. DeLauro said she believes contracting out eligibility services is a "big mistake" and that this alternative cannot adequately serve FSP recipients. DeLauro pressed the USDA officials to exercise strict oversight of the contract. She said she felt such oversight had been lacking when the Texas Health and Human Services Commission undertook a similar strategy to modernize some of the state's eligibility functions. In other remarks, DeLauro was critical of USDA's proposal to eliminate the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and move its recipients over to the FSP. The subcommittee's ranking member, Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), urged USDA to place a higher priority on moving FSP recipients to independence rather than emphasizing outreach to eligibles who do not now participate. A number of members urged USDA to focus more on nutrition and the health of program participants, particularly

children, and to take more active steps to promote the purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Bill Would End Medicaid and SCHIP Waiting Period for Legal Immigrant Children

This week, Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) introduced a bipartisan bill, the Legal Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act of 2007. The legislation would eliminate the five-year waiting period for new legal immigrants before the federal government will reimburse states for providing Medicaid and SCHIP services. The waiting period was instituted for Medicaid as part of the 1996 welfare reform law and for SCHIP in 1997. The lawmakers believe that this would provide states with the option to receive federal reimbursement if they extend health services to new legal immigrant children and pregnant women. Similar legislation has been introduced in the House by Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) and Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). Additional information on state-funded medical assistance for immigrants can be found online at [here](#) and [here](#).

Legislation Would Allow Child Support Incentive Payments as IV-D Match

On March 7, Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), chair of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, introduced a bill (H.R.1386) to repeal a provision enacted in the DRA that prohibited states from using their earned child support incentive payments to match federal IV-D funds. The effect of the DRA provision reduced federal child support funding to states in excess of \$1.6 billion. The bill has 10 co-sponsors. Sen. John D. Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) introduced a companion bill, S. 803, with four co-sponsors: Sens. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), Herb Kohl (D-Wis.), John Cornyn (R-Tex.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).

ACF Proposes Child Care Error Rate System

On March 2, ACF issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for Child Care and Development Fund Error Rate Reporting. The proposal revises CCDF regulations to provide for the reporting of error rates in the expenditure of CCDF grant funds by the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. According to the notice, the error rate reports will serve to implement provisions of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002 and the President's Management Agenda's goal of "eliminating improper payments." ACF will use the improper authorization for payment error rates and amounts to compute a national improper authorizations for payment rate and amount that will be reported annually in the HHS Performance and Accountability Report beginning with FY 2008. During the initial information collection, states would evaluate both the frequency with which errors occurred in eligibility determinations and the amount of improper authorizations for payment. States will prepare a report calculating the percentage of cases with an error; the percentage of cases with an improper authorization for payment (expressed as the total number of cases with an improper authorization for payment compared to the total number of cases); the percentage of improper authorizations for payment (expressed as the total amount of improper authorizations for payment compared to the total dollar amount of authorizations made); the average amount of improper authorization for payment; and the estimated annual amount of improper authorizations for payment. The report will also provide strategies for reducing the error rates and will allow states to set target error rates for the next cycle. ACF will use a three-year rotational cycle to measure improper authorization for payment in child care programs in the states. This notice was published in the March 2 Federal Register (72 FR 9491-9499) and is available [online](#). ACF will accept comments until May 1, 2007.

APHSA Sets Tentative Dates for Rescheduled Spring Conference

APHSA is pleased to announce that the Hyatt hotel chain has offered to reschedule our Spring Conference, National Council Meeting and National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators Spring Conference at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill on June 1-5, 2007 at the same room rate. This is a hotel where we have held many meetings, including our 2006 Summer Conference. We are in the process of ensuring that the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill can accommodate our space needs and then developing a contract with the hotel. We are also attempting to simplify the hotel registration process for those previously registered at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City. We expect to have these items finalized shortly and will inform all registrants immediately once this has occurred. We invite and encourage you to save these tentative dates for the rescheduled conferences:

- NAPCWA Conference – June 1 for Executive Committee and June 2 to June 4 for full NAPCWA Conference
- New State CEO Orientation – June 2
- APHSA Conference – June 3 to June 5

For full details, visit the [APHSA web site](#).